

Problem statement

Pakistan, with a total population of over 140 million, has more than 30 million adolescents (aged 10-19). With fertility only beginning to decline, the proportion of adolescents in the population will remain high at least for the medium term (Feeney and Alam 2003). Many assume that the ensuing population momentum is a problem to be solved. However, as these adolescents reach not only their reproductive but also their productive years, they clearly represent a critical element in Pakistan's political and economic future. For them to be a positive force, research has to focus on social and economic opportunities along with aspirations of adolescents and how they vary by individual, family and community traits.

The transition to adulthood is widely diverse in Pakistan. At the individual level, the most important variations in life course, capabilities and liabilities appear to be determined by gender and socio-economic status of households (Lloyd et al, 2003) There are wide differences across communities in opportunities and constraints depending on resources allocated generally and on services and programs provided by government and other civil society organizations (Kuper and Kuper 1989). These clearly point to significant variation in the communities and surrounding social mores, in the opportunities available for education and work, and in the diffusion of ideas emanating from outside links and influence. Impacts such as these have received less attention in terms of exploring outcomes in transitions to adulthood, their timing and their nature.

Data

We will utilize the Adolescent and Youth Survey in Pakistan 2001/2002 which has explored a wide range of issues regarding young people (Population Council, 2003). It is the largest national representative sample survey of its kind to be undertaken in Pakistan interviewing 8,074 young people aged 15 – 24 in 4,884 homes. This included 4,803 adolescents (15-19) and 3,271 youth (20-24). For these young people the survey instruments included a life event calendar, a time use chart and several modules of questions regarding schooling, work, marriage and childbearing and attitudes, autonomy and mobility. The main markers of transitions to adulthood will be drawn from these data.

The survey also interviewed 4,884 responsible adults who were mainly the parents of the young interviewees, to ask them about their attitudes regarding children's schooling, work and marriage as well as differences between sons and daughters. From these data we will be able to construct measures of household/parental attitudes towards major transitions of young people's lives.

In addition key informants (teachers, social workers and community leaders) in 254 of the sampled communities were also interviewed. Data are available on number of schools, distance to major town and city, health center, NGOs and other related details. Thus for each adolescent source data are available at the individual, household and community level.

Methods

Potential associations between adolescents' lives, their education, work and marriage as related to their status within households including the relationship with parents and their attitudes will be explored. The outcomes in which we are most interested are whether attended school and level attended, whether worked, age at entry into and type of work, activity of those not working, and age at marriage and parenthood. Age, gender, socio-economic status, household characteristics and living standards, parental characteristics including an index gauging parental attitudes, urban-rural residence will be used as the main explanatory variables and where appropriate access to relevant resources.

For this paper we will link data sourced at three levels, the individual adolescent, household/ parental attitudes and the context of the community in which they reside. Multivariate multilevel analysis will enable us to extract the impacts of household and community on adolescent opportunities and constraints and eventual manifestation in transitions to adulthood. Through multilevel modeling, observed variations in transitional experiences will be apportioned to that emanating from variations between individuals within households, between households within communities, between communities within regions and between regions.

Explanatory characteristics associated with significant variation at each level are identified and the nature of the relationships examined. This model fitting exercise evaluates factors representing differential access and experience at each level. Examination of residuals then identifies specific communities which deviate notably from the norm in terms of having values considerably greater or less than expected from the fitted model. Cross cohort analysis will also be important to portray trends in these transitions as we have a wide enough age band to look at 15-19 year olds separately from 20-24 year olds in the analysis.

Hypotheses to be explored

The report on the survey points primarily at gender and poverty as the main explanatory factors for whether and for how long young persons attend school, drop out, take up work (including type of work and for how they spend their time otherwise, and eventually when they marry and become parents. However, the impact in each case may vary substantially depending on the effect of communities and region. It is these effects that we want to focus on in this study.

- Do communities carry imprints of socio-cultural values, which exaggerate or ameliorate gender differences in educational, work and marriage timing and outcomes?
- Do structural differences in communities define opportunities (as an environment of greater schooling, wider choice of work and later marriage opportunities) which influence the lives of young people beyond differences in urban and rural residence?
- Do community opportunity structures influence the impacts of poverty on outcomes for adolescents: are some communities able to offer breaks from poverty more than others?

References

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